

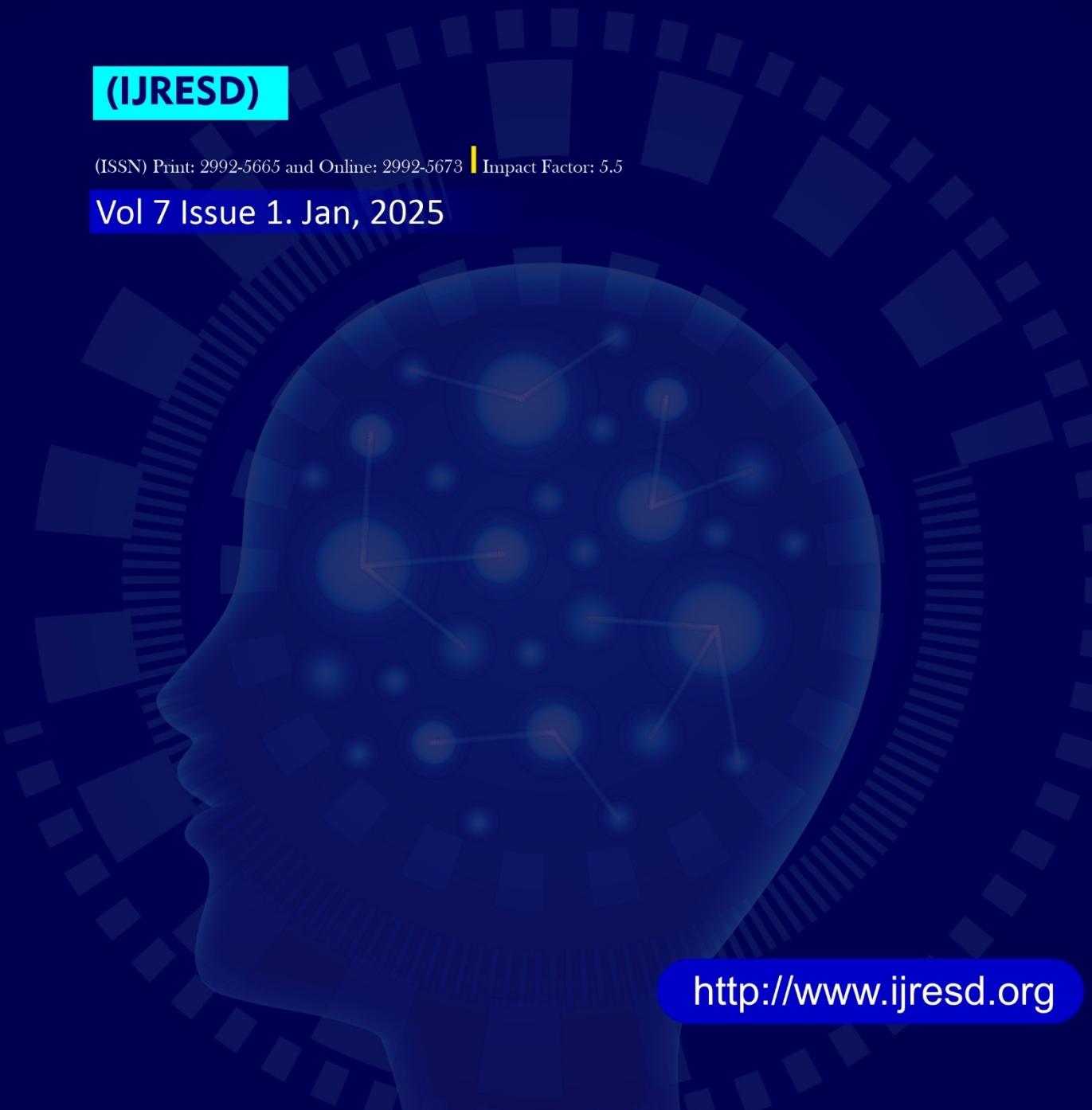


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The background of the cover features a large, semi-transparent circular graphic. This graphic consists of a central cluster of glowing blue and white dots connected by thin lines, resembling a molecular network or a brain scan. This central circle is surrounded by several concentric rings of dark blue squares, creating a gear-like or sunburst effect that radiates outwards.

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INDEPENDENT NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION AND THE MANAGEMENT OF ELECTION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF 2019 AND 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

Ifeoma Ezeabasili (Ph.D)

Department Of Political Science

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus

&

Chibuzo Okwudili Onyechi

Department Of Political Science

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus

ABSTRACT

The 2019 and 2023 General Elections represented an important period for the study of party financing in Nigeria. This study examined the comparative study of how Security Agents impacted on INEC's management of elections in Nigeria, Rate of voters turnout witnessed by INEC and how vote buying hitched INEC's conduct of elections in Nigeria. The study collected data using a secondary method of data collection. Secondary data will be obtained from such documents as the Electoral Act, INEC Guidelines for the conduct of the various elections, government and institutional materials, reports of the various domestic and international election observer missions, various researched articles in referred journals and textbooks, Newspaper reports, and various other documented and credible sources of information. The data collected were analyzed and interpreted using thematic descriptive qualitative discussions. The study on 2019 and 2023 general elections found out that Security Agents did not perform creditably well in both 2019 and 2023 general election, there was Low Rate of Voter Turnout in 2019 and 2023 general elections. High Level of votes buying hitched INEC's conduct of 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The study therefore recommended that it is important that government should do everything within its powers to cultivate a culture that enthuses voters to play their important part in a democracy characterized as government for, by and of the people.

1. Introduction

INEC is the election management body that organized 2019 and 2023 general elections. The actions or inactions of INEC were therefore of strategic importance to the results of the elections and their credibility, acceptance or rejection; since the Commission's omissions or commissions

could make or mar the credibility of elections and the electoral process in general.

According to Attahiru Jega (2019), former chairman of the Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC), Nigeria has witnessed a consistent decline in electoral voting in the past decade or so. The voting turnout for the general election was 52.2% in

1999, 69.08% in 2003, 57.49% in 2007, 53.68% in 20011, 43.65% in 2015 and 34.75% in 2019. Elections are the cornerstone of a democratic system, as they enable citizens to exercise their right to vote and choose their representatives. INEC's role in conducting free, fair, and credible elections ensures that the democratic process is upheld and that the will of the people is respected. Through elections, citizens have the opportunity to elect representatives at various levels of government. INEC's role ensures that the process is inclusive, allowing all eligible citizens to participate, regardless of their background or status.

The 2019 & 2023 general elections however, have been described as depicting a major turning point in Nigeria's political history. The elections attracted audience from most part of the world. Observers both local and international described the election as success. The centrality of competitive, credible, free, fair and acceptable elections in democracy cannot be over-emphasized. However contrary has been the experience in Nigeria as over the years elections were characterized by high incidence of electoral malaise manifesting in the prevalence of electoral rigging, fraud, violence, and other forms of electoral malpractices and irregularities which tend to erode established electoral standards and pose challenge to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections in the country.

Both general elections (2019 & 2023) have come and gone amidst mixed feelings surrounding credibility of the outcome of the electoral process. International observers have labeled the election as being a success but marred by planning and logistic problems; pro-government roles of federal security agencies and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC),

thugger, arson, insecurity, militarization, intimidation of voters and violation of human rights; commercialization of votes and outright rigging. Several others have cited the case of the Card Reader machine which were effective in some units and zones but ineffective in some other places. There were also reports of electronic manipulation of the Card Readers, deliberate non-use, poor signals arising from bad network, weak battery; confusion as to whether manual accreditation should replace use of the device were it is ineffective and in ability or slow ness of some electoral adhoc staff in operating the simple machine. The Card Reader pattern is also said to be inhibited by absence of specific and clear legal provisions to be so applied in elections, or be easily used for evidence in electoral tribunals and other courts (Etete, 2019).

However studies; such as Odoziobodo (2015), on this subject matter are plagued with conflicting findings. For instance, the studies of Aboh and Obom (2022) on INEC and Election related conflicts in Nigeria revealed that INEC has performed relatively low in its role of deepening democracy in Nigeria. While the existing studies are quite informative in their findings, their basic flaw is the tendency to heap the blames of electoral shortcomings on the electoral management body INEC thereby ignoring other factors that equally reflected electoral contestants and the conduct of elections in Nigeria. Also, as Ibeanu (2006) rightly observed, while extant studies of elections in Nigeria are useful, the basic weakness of most of such studies is that they are usually synchronic; that is, they focus on single elections. What is lacking, Ibeanu notes, is adiachronic study of elections. It is for this reason that this study examines the role of INEC in the conduct of elections in Nigeria

with focus on the 2019 and 2023 general elections.

The paper also highlights political party campaign finance for the need for strict enforcement of prevalent occurrences pertaining to it. It examines the provisions of the law applicable to political party campaign finance as contained in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended and the Electoral Act. It observes that the lack enforcement by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which is the body saddled with the responsibility for the enforcement. The paper reiterates that political party campaign finance if not checked will continue to be a threat to Nigeria's nascent democracy. The paper concludes by stating among others that the law of campaign finance need to be enforced by the appropriate body empowered under the electoral acts, to do so as this will go in a long way in curbing incessant political party campaign finance abuses in bringing to book candidates and political parties who have broken the provisions of the law.

2. Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What was the performance of security agents on INEC's management of 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria?
2. What is the rate of voters turnout witnessed by INEC in 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria?
3. How did vote buying hitched INEC's conduct of 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria?

3. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine INEC and Management of election in Nigeria: A comparative study of 2019 and 2023 general elections. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine how performance of security agents on INEC's management of 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria.
2. Ascertain the rate voter's turnout witnessed by INEC in management of 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria.
3. Assess how vote buying hitched INEC's conduct of 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

LITERATUREREVIEW

Election

Election is referred to the process of selecting or choosing individuals, options, or courses of action through a structured and often formalized mechanism. This multi-faceted concept holds significance in numerous domains, ranging from political systems to decision-making processes in different contexts. According to Johari, (2016), in the realm of politics, an election is a fundamental democratic process where citizens exercise their right to vote to elect representatives who will govern and make decisions on their behalf. These elected officials may hold positions in local, regional, or national bodies of government.

The overall series of activities and procedures involved in conducting an election, including voter registration, candidate nominations, campaigning, voting, and the subsequent counting and announcement of results, collectively form the electoral process (Johari, 2016). This

definition refers specifically to elections held to fill public offices such as the presidency, governorship and legislative positions. Through these elections, citizens have the opportunity to influence the leadership and direction of their country or community.

Elections are generally understood to refer to the process of chosen people for particular jobs by voting (Ojo, 2008). In the political realm, elections are conceived as a formal expression of preferences by the governed, which are then aggregated and transformed into a collective decision about who will govern? Who should stay in office, who should be thrown out, and who should replace those who have been thrown out? It is simply the process of elite selection system (Ojo, 2008). In other words Elections encapsulate the mediating institutional and psychological process and anchors for citizens, as adults in an organized and routinized manner to express their choice among those who seek public political office (Jinadu, 2005).

Election to a lay man could simply mean a process through which the masses bring out those to either take the mantle of leadership or represent their general interest at various levels. Genie, free and fair elections constitute the threshold or doorway into a democratic, stable and progressive society. Without free and fair elections there can be no democracy either direct or representative. Elections are part and parcel of the democratic process, and as the right to democratic governance has become established as a human right, so too has the right to regular, free, fair and credible elections. Thus by the resolution 45/50 of 1991, titled "Enhancing the effectiveness of the Principle of Periodic and Genuine Elections", the UN General Assembly stressed that;

Periodic and genuine elections are a necessary and indispensable element of sustained efforts to protect the rights and interests of the governed and that as a matter of practical experience, the right of everyone to take part in the government of his or her own country is a crucial factor in the effective enforcement by all in a wide range of other human rights and fundamental freedoms, embracing political, economic, social and cultural rights (UN, 1991).

Election Logistics

Election logistics refers to the comprehensive planning, coordination, and execution of all activities necessary to conduct elections effectively. This encompasses a wide range of tasks, from the transportation of voting materials to ensuring that polling places are adequately staffed and equipped. The complexity of election logistics can vary significantly depending on the size of the election, the geographic area involved, and the technologies used. The key components of election logistics entails the following:

- **Transportation and Supply Chain Management:** Efficient transport logistics are crucial for delivering electoral materials such as ballots, voting machines, and other supplies to polling locations. Organizations like Electoral Services International Inc. (ESI) specialize in providing global transportation solutions tailored specifically for elections. They handle everything from air freight to ocean shipping, ensuring that materials arrive securely and on time. ESI's expertise includes managing complex supply chains that may involve remote or challenging locations, ensuring that no order is too small or too large.
- **Ballot Production and Distribution:**

The production of ballots must be meticulously planned to ensure that each precinct receives the correct ballot type based on its unique voter demographics. For example, in Washington County, Arkansas, there are 323 different ballot styles due to various precincts. This requires careful forecasting based on historical voting data to avoid running out of ballots at polling places—a critical issue that could disenfranchise voters.

- **Polling Place Setup:** Setting up polling places involves logistical considerations such as securing locations, staffing with trained poll workers, and ensuring accessibility for all voters. Polling places must be equipped with necessary technology (like electronic voting machines) or paper ballots depending on local regulations and preferences.
- **Voting Technology Integration:** The integration of technology into the voting process has transformed election logistics significantly. Modern systems often utilize electronic marking devices like Express Vote machines that print paper ballots marked by voters. This technology not only streamlines the voting process but also aids in accurate counting through electronic ballot boxes like DS200 machines.
- **Security Measures:** Ensuring the security of election materials during transport is paramount. Secure transport methods are employed to prevent tampering or loss. Additionally, comprehensive inventory management practices help track supplies throughout their journey from warehouses to polling stations.
- **Post-Election Processes:** After polls close, logistical efforts shift towards counting votes and reporting results

efficiently while maintaining transparency. The use of technology can expedite this process; however, reliance on paper ballots can lead to longer counting times and increased scrutiny regarding election integrity.

Vote Buying

The phrase “Going, going, gone!” is frequently chanted to announce the selection of the highest bidder for an item being sold at auction. Vote buying, a dubious practice that has pervaded Nigeria’s recent electoral process, is nicely captured by this process of offering items for auction, receiving bids, and then selling them to the highest bidder. The practice of buying votes is not new to Nigerian elections or to Africa in general. To the contrary, “almost 80% of voters from 36 states in Nigeria believe voters are bribed, either occasionally, frequently, or always,” according to Nohlen. Additionally, during the most recent election, 16% of voters in African nations said they had been offered cash or products in exchange for their vote (Nohlen, 1996).

Vote-buying can be tagged as an emerging political phenomenon in Nigeria since the country returned to democracy in 1999, the implication is that such ugly tread in Nigeria current political landscape capable of rubbing the society of credible winners of election as the money bank candidates or politicians always win the polls which has aftermath effects on the general public.

Simply defined, vote buying is the exchange of votes for money or any material benefit either actual or potential. However, this definition suggests that votes are market commodities which the merchant is ready to dispose of for gain. If this is the case, it is not ethically wrong to buy and sell votes. Sha

(2006, p 124) defines vote buying as ‘any form of persuasion in which financial gain is suggested by one person to another with the intention of influencing a person’s vote’. Vote buying can also be defined as: ‘A gift or gratuity bestowed for the purpose of influencing the action or conduct of the receiver; especially money or any valuable consideration given or promised for the betrayal of a trust or the corrupt performance of an allotted duty, as to … a voter …’ Ojo (2006) sees vote buying as a form of ‘bribery consisting of money or other rewards for voting as directed’.

There are different forms of vote buying, apart from those specified in the 2006 Electoral Act. Among them are:

- direct inducement of the electorate with money to influence votes in favour of a particular political party or candidate;
- inducement of local political elites with money or materials in order to gain the block vote of a particular constituency;
- providing wards or electoral constituencies with materials such as clothing or food with the intention of getting their votes;
- purchasing cars or motorbikes, building houses and providing contracts for traditional rulers and local elites in order to get the votes of their subjects;
- paying political thugs to intimidate and harass the electorate to force them to vote for a particular political party or candidate;
- paying political thugs to snatch ballot boxes;
- paying security agents to aid in electoral fraud;

- paying electoral officials to aid in electoral fraud.

Aspinali, & Berenschot (2019) wrote that the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Nigeria witnessed an explosion in the use of the term “vote buying” in academic and media circles. They defined vote buying as the exchange of private material benefits for political support. Adding that, vote buying is seen as a contract, or perhaps an auction in which the voter sells his or her vote to the highest bidder.

Security

Security is a safety from harm; the degree of resistance to, or protection from harm. It applies to any vulnerable and valuable asset, such as a person, dwelling community, nation or organization. However, security as a word has different dimensions in psychology, public safety, defense and military matters, information etc. though is used in different disciplines and to mean different things but general meaning is „to protect“ and to provide maximum protection for certain thing. Despite that we are only concerned with security during election; it is still pertinent to acknowledge the fact that it is used in other areas like computer security, Data security, information security, human security, personal security, national security, financial security, electoral security, to mention but few.

As explained in this study, election gives citizens choices of choosing among the contesting parties and candidates through voting. Under democracy, elections are supposed to be conducted to ensure that the winner reflects the intention of the voters. To achieve this gargantuan task, the role of security is not subservient. Lai.(2013) argues that the success or failure of any election depends on the stakeholders performing their

duties (INEC, Political Parties, Election Observers, Media and Security Agencies). He laments that “the security agencies can make a difference in the outcome of elections. It is therefore important that security officers display the highest level of integrity, neutrality, professionalism and sense of duty. The protection of human life, voters, electoral materials and officials and the preservation of lawful and orderly electoral processes are necessary for credible, free and fair elections.” Just like the way Lai (2013) put it “security is indispensable to the conduct of free, fair and credible election. From the provision of the basic security to voters at political party rallies and campaigns to ensuring that result forms are protected, the whole electoral process is circumscribed by security considerations.” Thus, without adequate security, there cannot be credible, free and fair elections.

2.1.5 Campaign Finance

Nowadays, the active use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the educational process is the result of both the general trend to digitalize education and the forced transition to the implementation of many educational programs in a distance format due to the Covid19 pandemic.

Democracy is a form of governance that enables the governed to freely determine who will lead them in a presumably transparent manner (Achen & Bartels, 2016).

For a democratic rule to prevail, certain processes and activities are vital. One of these processes is the campaign, which is the advertisement of contending candidates' manifestos, ideologies, and policies, as well as programmes if they are elected (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019). A campaign requires massive expenditure, whether state-sponsored or privately pursued. The process of obtaining and using campaign expenditures is not left in a vacuum. Various democracies have designed regulations and conditions that demand strict compliance for the candidates and their parties in terms of sources of funds, procedures for accepting donations, spending, limits, disclosure, and auditing. All these processes are known as political party financing (Buttorff, 2019). Nigeria's elections are considered one of the most expensive in the world. For instance, the 2023 General Election is believed to have cost nearly N200billion for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the electoral body in the country, more than that of the 2019 General Election, According to (Abdulahi, 2016), The cost of obtaining nomination forms for the major parties of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) ran into multi- millions of Naira for various elective offices beyond the reach of the financially weak contestants; regulations were advertently violated; and the electoral process was bastardized with vote buying, bribery, and, worst of all, primitive accumulation accompanied the outcome of the election because the politicians engaged in contract projects that would return their electoral expenses (Sule & Sambo, 2020). One neglected aspect of the issues of the cost of elections and party financing is the security implications of the process of electoral conduct. A huge sum of money was spent on illegal campaign activities such as

sponsorship of thugs and violence, which affected the process in the 2019 General Election.

Election Management

Oromareghake (2013), states that the capacity of an Election Management Body is to competently administer and manage elections that meet global and regional standards of credible, free and fair elections constitutes the foundation of a democratic society. Nigeria's remarkable progress in this procedural aspect of democracy in the after math of the fundamentally flawed 2007 election is widely acknowledged. The series of electoral reform implemented in the aftermath of the 2019 elections leading to the current stay of Professor YAKUBU Mahamood as the Chairman of INEC as well as the amendment of the 1999 Constitution and the Electoral Act (2010), with the former largely focused on electoral matters, and how therefor minitiatives impacted on the conduct of the 2023 elections in particular is well documented.

Omotola (2009), submitted that for ensuring further improvement in the 2019 elections was made possible by a combination of innovative measures and improved internal capacity within INEC for electoral governance which are discussed later in this study. The elections provided opportunity for leveraging on partnerships with the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) with the corps members trained and deployed as adhoc staff and the security agencies which were established during the 2019 elections, The new media which created immense possibility for inclusive electoral process as evident in the way these media sources were cultivated especially by the youth population. This proved to be more veritable platforms of participation in the election,

especially for the youth, women and the physically challenged persons who pressed for greater visibility as voters and as candidates.

Voters Registration

In preparation for the 2019 General Election, the total number of registered voters across the country increased with 15.3 million making a final number of valid voters to stand at 84, 004, 084 million. The male constitutes 53% of the total voters while female is 47%. Statistics indicated that the younger ones dominated the larger percentage of voters with those from the age of 18-35 constitutes 51%, 36-50 years 30%, 51-70years 15% and 70 and above years 4% and this by implication indicated that 81% of the total registered voters are younger than 50 years of age (Abdulkadir & Maigari, 2022).

By occupation, the voters' registrations showed that students are the highest with a total number of 22.3 million, farming/fishing 13.6 million, housewives 11.8 million, business10.8 million, trading 7.6 million, civil servants 5.0 million, artisans 4.5 million, others 6.0 million while nobody indicated that he is a politician or public servant. The voters' registration by geopolitical zones indicated that the Northwest has the highest number of voters of 20.2 million, Northeast 11.3 million, North central 13.4 million, and Southwest16.3 million, Southeast 10.1 million and South-south 12.8 million with total polling units of 119, 973 across the country.

2.1.8 Voter's Turnout

Political participation, which has attracted considerable academic interests (Franklin,

2004) is one of the oldest concepts in the comparative study of politics. Yet it remains an essentially contested concept, with a variety of definitions on parade, each of which is either too general or too narrow. Conge (1988) made a comprehensive study of some of these definitions to underscore this limitation, as well as the typology of arguments over the meaning of the concept.

Political participation entails ‘all voluntary activities by individual citizens intended to influence either directly or indirectly political choices at various levels of the political system’. In a more expanded version, Nohlen (1996) defines political participation as an ‘action of private citizens intended to influence the actions or the composition of national or local government’. From these definitions Conge (1988) moved on to identify the broad categories of debate about the meaning of political participation. These were:

- Active versus passive form: should political participation be defined only in terms of action – voting, campaigning for a political party – or should it include passive forms – a feeling of patriotism, an awareness of political issues?
- Aggressive versus non-aggressive behaviour: should a definition of political participation embrace civil disobedience and political violence or should it be limited to more ‘conventional’ activities?
- Structural versus non-structural objects: should efforts to change or maintain the form of government be included in a definition of political participation or should the definition be limited to changing or maintaining

government authorities and/or their decisions?

- Governmental versus non-governmental aims: should political participation be limited to behaviour directed towards government authorities, policies and/or institutions or should it include phenomena outside the realm of government?
- Mobilised versus voluntary action: should behaviour sponsored and guided by the government to enhance its welfare be called political participation or should the term be confined to behaviour initiated by citizens in pursuit of their interests?
- Intended versus unintended outcomes: should behaviour that has an unintended consequence for a government be defined as political participation?

Voters Education and Accessibility

The National Commissioner in Charge of Voter Education and Publicity, Barrister Festus Okoye has charged participants at an INEC/IFES Voter Education Manual Review/Validation and Training of Trainers Workshop at Royal Birds Hotel, Akure, Ondo State to keep themselves a breast of the policies of the Commission for effective and efficient Voter education. Barrister Okoye told the participants that the Commission was presently meeting with stakeholders with a view to getting their buy in for the intention of the Commission to expand Voter Access to Polling Units. The National Commissioner who was represented by Mr. Nick Dazang, Director of Voter Education and Publicity exhorted the participants to

gear up to keep with the pace of the Commission in its various critical programmes in 2021.

In his remarks, Resident Electoral Commissioner, Ondo State, Ambassador Rufus Akeju identified adequate voter education as the only panacea for electoral infractions. He charged the participants to intensify effective voter education drive to eliminate electoral infractions in our electoral process. Director, Voter Education and Publicity, Nick Dazang represented by Director, Gender, and Blessing Obidegwu noted that the Commission attaches high premium to the training and retraining of its staff for enhanced productivity.

INEC and Challenges of conducting General Elections in Nigeria

Nigeria's elections are still prone to violence. Nigeria has a long history of violence during elections and it sadly manifested again in 2023. Violence marred the elections in parts of the country: Lagos, Delta Kogi and Kano States. Violence was also recorded in Ebonyi and Enugu States. The EU election observation mission also noted how violence disturbed voting in some areas.

In Enugu, the Labour Party senatorial candidate for Enugu East was killed 72 hours before the February elections, stated, reports indicate that the decision was connected to allegations of his involvement in irregularities during the federal election in the state. The Commission had earlier directed its Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) in Abia State, Ike Uzochukwu, to stay away from office for "endangering electoral process" during the 25 February federal election.

Electoral Fraud and the Sustenance of

Democracy in Nigeria

Without doubt, elections are viable instrument for the sustenance of an enduring democracy. It is evident that in Nigeria, studies have shown that elections rather than serve as an instrument of deepening the democracy, are rather a source of crises and conflict. According to Akemuke (2010), democracy and development are inseparable; therefore, the inability or lack of will to conduct credible, free and fair elections has negatively affected the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. Electoral malpractices in Nigeria have brought about political instability in the country which is responsible in part to the collapse of the first, second and third Republics. It has purported the entrenchment of dictatorship and political instability. It rather halts the process of development through wanton destruction of lives and property; as well as hatred that usually becomes the order of the day after

elections (Uduma, 2013).

In the old Western region, the “Wild West” slogan is traceable to electoral malpractices and the violence of the second Republic, which led to death of many people with property worth billions of naira destroyed. In the fourth Republic, the dastardly act of imposition of candidates, falsification of election results and other electoral vices, has given room to several crises in many parts of Nigeria. It has produced leaders who do not to be their allegiance to the populace; thereby creating hatred, distrust and insecurity in the country. Resources meant for development purposes are often used in settling political crises and conflicts which arose due to electoral malpractices. It is evident that the electoral commission in Nigeria is directed by the incumbency factors, which use the security agencies and men of muscle (Ndi Akpuobi) as hatchet men. The media is maximized for propaganda, distribution of money in sack bags to perceived opponents or critics in order to silence them. Therefore, to conduct elections that could stand the test of time becomes a collective endeavour (Uduma, 2013).

Empirical Review

In his view, Kambale (2011), avers that the central role which electoral competition is now playing in the political life of an increasing number of African countries means that the management of elections by effective and efficient election management body is indispensable. The performance of election management body in electoral management is, however, seen to depend on the extent and quality of citizens' participation in the government of their country. The institutional framework for these bodies, and their endowment with

adequate human and financial resources, is seen to be an important concern in the constitutional reforms that have accompanied the second wave of democratization in West Africa. These reforms have focused on the need to give the EMBs greater legal and institutional independence, since the performance of the EMBs and their contribution to a higher level of citizen participation depends on much more than only formal guarantees of independence and adequate resources.

Adibe (2017), in a study on INEC and the Challenges of Free and Fair Elections in Nigeria interrogated the philosophy of “Free and Fair” elections in Nigeria and also what it means for INEC to be independent in a brittle state like Nigeria. He argued that the character of the Nigerian state and the centrality of political power make elections inherently controversial while inefficiencies on the part of INEC only aggravate or make available the zest for such contentions. In a corroborating this view, Adebiyi (2017), examined the feat of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the 2015 general elections. The assessment was based on some vital issues of the electioneering process, which include: the distribution of permanent voters' card and continuous voters' registration, recruitment and training of adhoc staff, distribution of sensitive and non-sensitive materials, the use of electronic card reader and Diaspora voting. It is therefore apt to say that the overall performance of INEC was commendable to certain degree. This is a matter of truism because it has never been heard of that an incumbent who possesses the desired political and economic powers conceded defeat to an opposition. The accolades and success notwithstanding, areas are where it was discovered that there are still

a lot to be done to improve on future elections.

Theoretical Framework

Public Choice Theory

The study adopts public choice theory of Buchanan and Tullock (1962). They are considered as the leading proponents of public choice theory while other prominent contributors were Libecap (1989), Mueller (1989), Rowley (1995) and Wills (1997).

Buchanan (1973) sees public choice theory as the application of analytical methods of economics to political science challenges. The analysis of forces of self-interest which works out in the political process did not commence with the proponents of public choice. It can rather be traced back to the writings of Machiavelli and Hobbes who were among the early contributors of the approach to political economy. Duncan Black also clearly reflected in his writing generally seen as the beginning of the modern public choice theory era. Hill (1999) opines that public choice theory has its origin on the economic prototype of balanced choice founded upon the economic model of rational choice, having the clear objective of expediting exchange of work and ideas at the connection of economics, political science and sociology.

This theory analyzes political or governmental decision making. In terms of models obtained from the behavioral choices of individuals or actors in the political arena, public choice theory analyzes various choices which confront individuals as public actors, such as voters and non-voters, participants, and non-participants in pressure groups, bureaucrat politicians who are in and outside government (Buchanan,

1973).

In public choice theory individuals, bureaucrats, interest groups and politicians are assumed to seek their own self-interest. The decisions made is dependent on the cuts and benefits of the action taken where each group attempts to maximize their own net benefits. Benefits can either be monetary or non-monetary, it can be ideologies, goals, and cultural values. This theory sees political decisions far from being made efficient and dispassionately in pursuit of the public interest.

Public choice theory therefore, voting and legislating are processes in which individuals can pursue their own, often conflicting interests. Different decisions making systems will produce very different policy choices (Butler, 2012). Nations, bureaucrats, politicians including interest groups in turn result in the adoption of a particular stance in the specification of institutions and property rights. It is regarded as exchange relationship in which one group concedes to the order in as much as their self-interests are met notwithstanding that all the decisions are taken in the public interest.

Some scholars such as Kelman (1987) and Rowley (1987) have put forward criticisms of the theory of public choice. Kelman (1987) argues that the science of public choice is destructive to the social good, because it creates a cynicism about the political process and becomes a self-fulfilling philosophy. Kelman further suggests that crucial to any ability to maintain public spirit is the presence of continuing existence of a social norm that declares it appropriate for people to try to do the right thing in public behavior and in appropriate for them to simply seek advance in their personal interest. Public choice

theory provides cynical descriptive conclusions about behavior and even government that threaten to undermine the norm prescribing public spirit which could later on discourage community service in its entirety. Another scholar Rowley (1987) has also argued that though public choice provides powerful insights to human behavior in regard to political interests, they are propelled by the most pessimistic vision of mankind. The emphasis of public choice literature is so pervasive on the utility and wealth destruction imposed by self-seeking agents, which few scholars of public choice escape completely untainted by cynicism.

The criticism put forward by Kelman (1987) was addressed by Brennan and Buchanan (1988) stating that notwithstanding the fact that they did not believe that narrow self-interest is the sole motive of political agents or that it is necessarily as relevant a motive in political as compared to a market setting, certainly, they believe it is a significant motive for political agents and public officials.

Brennan and Buchanan 1988 posits that it would be immoral to base analysis upon the false assumption that all political behavior is motivated by a concern for the public interest. And in both scholars agreeing with Kelman public choice can be immoral to the extent that it destroys the public spirit. Brennan and Buchanan also argue that their constitutional perspective means that public choice gives some hope for public spirited action through constitutional reform.

METHODOLOGY

Research design to be adopted is the Comparative Research design. Inline with this, our data will be based on documents which is a detailed and systematic

examination of the contents of a particular body of materials for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases.

Methods of Data Collection

This study shall adopt the secondary method of data collection. Secondary data will be obtained from such documents as the Electoral Act, INEC Guidelines for the conduct of the various elections, government and institutional materials, reports of the various domestic and international election observer missions, various researched articles in referred journals and textbooks, Newspaper reports, and various other documented and credible sources of information with regard to the subject of our investigation.

Methods of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed based on content analysis and systematic logical induction. Content analysis is the technique of analyzing "data through examination of documents research". Content analysis is a systematic research method used to analyze qualitative data, particularly text. It involves identifying the presence of specific words, themes, or concepts within various forms of communication. Researchers utilize this method to quantify and analyze the meanings and relationships among these elements, allowing them to draw inferences about the messages conveyed in the texts, as well as insights into the authors, audiences, and cultural contexts surrounding the material. (Biereenu-Nnabugwu, 2008).

Brief Overview of the 2019 and 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

Overview and Uniqueness of the 2019 General Elections

There are several things that make the 2019 elections unique. This sixth general election in this Fourth Republic is the first to be conducted by the Prof. Mahmood Yakubu-

led Independent National Electoral Commission. Although since coming into office in November 2015, his team has conducted 196 off- Plan 2017–2021; thereafter, there were Election Management System, Election Project Plan and Elections Operations Support Centre (Punch Newspaper, 2019)

A factsheet on the 2019 General Election revealed that there were 84 million registered voters out of which 72 million voters collected their Permanent Voter Cards; 91 registered political parties; 119,973 Polling Units; 120 Accredited Domestic Observers and 36 Accredited Foreign Observers and 23,000 candidates competing for 1,558 positions. Seven elections were also conducted over two Saturdays. They were Presidential, Senate and House of Representatives elections on February 23 and governorship, state Houses of Assembly, chairmanship and councillorship elections of the six Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory held on March 9, 2019. This is unprecedented in Nigeria's electoral history (Punch Newspaper, 2019)

Being the most competed for, the election attracted lots of controversies. From October 7, 2018, when political parties were done with their primaries, there was over 640 court cases from aggrieved aspirants. The electoral commission is joined as defendants in all these pre-election cases. In the lead-up to the elections, there was a constitution amendment that now pegs the time limit for pre-election matters. Hitherto, there used to be no such thing but on June 8, 2018,

President Muhammadu Buhari signed into law the Fourth Alteration No. 21 which now asks all aggrieved aspirants to file their matter within 14 days of the action while courts are to deliver judgments on such matters within 180 days while appeals from

such judgments shall also be disposed off within 60 days. Recall that President Buhari had also opened up the political space for the Nigerian youth a head of the elections.

The Nation Newspaper (2019) reported that a number of unprecedented things that happened during this electioneering period included the open anti-party activities of two All Progressives Congress governors. Governors Rochas Okorocha of Imo State and Ibikunle Amosun of Ogun State defied the party that brought them to power by sponsoring and supporting opposition candidates against their own party candidates. While Okorocha preferred his son-in-law, Uche Nwosu of the Action Alliance, to succeed him, Amosun chose Abiodun Akinlade of the Allied People's Movement. They encouraged the set woto defect from the APC to the Action Alliance and All Progressives Movement respectively. Meanwhile, the two governors did not defect with their adopted godsons but rather stayed put in the APC, contested and won elections into the Senate. Ahead of the March 9 governorship election, the APC leadership suspended the two governors while equally threatening them with expulsion.

Another thing that singled out the 2019 general election is the high number of cancelled votes due to violence, over-voting and non-adherence to the use of Smart Card Readers. The cancelled votes which are in millions brought about five inconclusive governorship elections in Kano, Sokoto, Plateau, Adamawa and Benue State. INEC initially enlisted Bauchi among the states before reversing itself after a review of the investigative panel it set up on the governorship election. There were also seven inconclusive governorship elections, 24 inconclusive House of Representatives

election and three inconclusive Area Council chairmanship polls in the FCT..

During the Imo State senatorial election, the Returning Officer for the Imo West senatorial election, Prof Innocent Ibeawuchi, alleged that he was forced to declare Okorocha the winner of the poll by the supporters of the APC candidate. He was reportedly held hostage from 7pm on Sunday, February 24 till 11 am on Monday, February 25. The don said because he feared for his life, he had to announce the result which he claimed was inconclusive, because of the alleged electoral fraud in eight LGAs. For allegedly making its Returning Officer to declare result under duress, INEC has withheld the Certificate of Return for Okorocha. This thus cast doubt on the capabilities of the security agents meant to protect INEC officials during the 2019 general elections. In Bauchi State, INEC similarly reviewed the declaration of his Returning Officer concerning the nullification of the result of Tafawa Balewa Local Government Area. According to the commission, its investigative panel found out that half way into the LG collation, armed gangs attacked the collation centre and destroyed the LG Result Sheet (EC8C) and some collated results from the Registration Areas. The results of seven out of the 11 Registration Areas for governorship and six out of the 11 for state Assembly elections were affected. The collation officer, under pressure from party agents who could not wait for the arrival of a replacement result sheet, decided to collate the result on an available RA result sheet instead of the replacement LGA result sheet. "The investigation committee also established that the number of cancelled votes for the four Polling Units in Ningi LGA which was recorded as 25,330 in Form EC40G (1) was incorrect. The actual figure

is 2,533 (Punch Newspaper, 2019).

The 2019 elections have thrown up a lot of issues no doubt. One thing the commission cannot take for granted is the appointment of credible and trustworthy people as Collation and Returning Officers. Recall that on March 11, 2019 INEC ordered the arrest of the Collation Officer for Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State, Kelechi Ezirim, as well as the Electoral Officer for the LG, Chris Ogbuadu. They were handed over to the police for committing electoral fraud.

Security and Conduct of General Elections in Nigeria

Security forces that are poorly trained, unequipped, erratically paid or politicized can exacerbate electoral violence through forceful tactics and incompetence; rough, even lethal rules of engagement by police in Zimbabwe in 2008 are examples of such tactics. Rules of engagements can also allow riots to continue and expand. For example, in East Timor (1999), despite a substantial Indonesian security presence, including the army and national police, the local militia was still able to rampage and kill, injure, and displace thousands of independence supporters (USAID, 2010, p.9). The causes of electoral violence in Nigeria have been attributed to poverty/unemployment, ineffective security agencies, weak penalties, weak governance and corruption and small arms proliferation (Campbell, 2010). Security is indispensable to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. From the provision of basic security to voters at political party rallies and campaigns to ensure that result forms are protected, the whole electoral process is circumscribed by security considerations (Olurode, 2013). Past elections in Nigeria had clearly shown the bias position of some security agencies, who

are supposed to be absolutely neutral and impartial in supervising the system to ensure fair play and security of life and properties (Abdullahi, 2016). Thus, they are obviously found to be active collaborators in subverting the process. In most cases, they succumb to government influence, collect bribe to harass and intimidate voters. More so, they provide cover for electoral officials and politicians to destroy electoral materials, intimidate voters, or fully engage in electoral violence just to rig elections. These actions give rise to protests and subsequent violence by aggrieved individuals and parties. Against the back drop of the challenges associated with elections in Nigeria, the volatility of our nation and the innumerable flashpoints growing in Nigeria, the conduct of elections cannot take place without these security agencies playing a role. The role of the security forces in the fourth republic include: election monitoring, enforcement of law and order, protection of vital elections materials and intervention in trouble spots during elections. Security operatives assigned to monitor elections must adequately understand the entire electoral process in order to prevent, detect and avert irregularities in elections. They must understand the purpose of necessary electoral documents.

Election Security Agents and Management of 2019 and 2023 General Elections

The Independent National Election Commission (INEC) has declared the results of the elections held on 23rd February 2019 into the Offices of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the National Assembly, namely the Senate and House of Representatives and declared results of the elections held on 25th February, 2023 and declared the winner for the 2023 election into

the Offices of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the National Assembly, namely the Senate and House of Representatives as well. On the 1st of March, 2023 after concluding the collation of election results from the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. INEC offices in the States and FCT declared the winners of the various elected members into the Senate and House of Representatives following the conclusion of the collation of results.

CLEEN Foundation is convinced that the election security measures put in place are important and indispensable in the conduct of credible and violence free elections. The conduct of security personnel before, during and after the elections is important to the success of the election management institution, political parties, candidates, voters and election observer groups. Elections are significant in marking the transition from one regime to another after every four years. The 2023 General Election is the sixth transitional election in Nigeria. Beyond the role of the election management institution, the success and credibility of the elections are measured by the extent to which security is guaranteed and the conduct of security personnel in the elections. During 2019 general elections, CLEEN Foundation welcomes the introduction of the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) Unified Code of Conduct and Rules of Engagement for all Security Agencies on Election Duties. It also welcomes the collaboration between the Offices of the National Security Adviser and the Inspector General of Police on election security management as exemplary.

COMPARATIVE STUDY AND CONDUCT OF 2019 AND 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS

The 2019 and 2023 general election show

ever, have been described as depicting a major turning point in Nigeria's political history. The elections attracted audience from most part of the world. Observers both local and international described the election as both success. The centrality of competitive, credible, free, fair and acceptable elections in democracy cannot be over-emphasized (Zainawa, 2014). However contrary has been the experience in Nigeria as over the years elections were characterized by high incidence of electoral malaise manifesting in the prevalence of electoral rigging, fraud, violence, and other forms of electoral malpractices and irregularities which tend to erode established electoral standards and pose challenge to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections in the country.

Both elections has never been that costly in Nigeria compared to 2011 and 2015. While there have been studies as mentioned earlier (Onyekpere, 2015; Nwangwu & Ononogbu, 2016; Suleetal., 2017a; Suleetal., 2017b; Suleetal., 2018a; Suleet al., 2018b; Sule et al., 2018c) on the cost of the election in 2019, then on the 2023 General Election received less or inadequate attention on the subject matter. The 2019 General Election marked the fifth uninterrupted democratic transition, signaling democratic stability in Nigeria for the first time in its history. 92 parties contested with thousands of contestants in various elective offices and over 80 million registered voters participated involving massive campaign spending.

In the 2019 General Election, 23,000 candidates contested for various elective offices, from the Presidency to the level of the State House of Assembly. With 91 total registered political parties, 73 candidates vied for the post of President; 73 contested for the office of Vice President; 1,064 battled

for the gubernatorial election; 1,064 sought for the post of Deputy Governorship; 1,903 contested for the Senate; 4703 contested for the House of Representatives; 14,643 for State Houses of assembly; 105 candidates for the Chairperson of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja; and 701 contested for FCTA Councillorship. The ruling APC made N6.9 billion from the sale of nomination forms distributed: N45 billion for nomination forms from President Buhari, N3.59 billion for 160 governorship candidates, N1.95 billion for expressions of interest and nominations by senatorial candidates, and N1.39 billion for members of the House of Representatives (Okakwu, 2021). The above figures omit the cost of nominating state houses of assemblies, which runs into the billions. The PDP, on the other hand, secured over N3 billion in the sale of nomination forms in the 2019 primaries, as announced in its headquarters in Abuja (Daily Trust, December 12, 2021). The APC made billions from the sale of nomination forms in the 2023 primaries. The cost of expression and nomination in 2023 was N100 million. About 25 aspirants purchased the forms, and the party is believed to have made over N2 billion in presidential nomination forms alone (Sule, 2023). In total, the APC earned N30 billion from the sale of expressions of interest and nomination forms in the 2023 primaries (Uwugiaren & Akinwale, 2023). The major opposition PDP is estimated to earn about N17.3 from the sale of nomination forms across all elective offices (Onuba, 2022).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

Based on the research questions, the following findings were made

1. Security Agents did not perform creditably well on INEC's management of 2019 and 2023 general election: There was a record cases of intimidation and harassment of voters by overzealous security agents in Sokoto State during 2019 presidential and National Assembly election. In addition, there was also a report that same security agents barred them from taking photos and recording the voting processes in the same state.
2. A low rate of voters turnout was witnessed by INEC in the 2019 and 2023 general election: Nigeria recorded less than 25 percent voter's turnout in the 2023 general election, it is worth pointing out that the south-south region, which had the highest voter turnout in southern Nigeria in 2019, recorded the worst turnout in the 2023 general election. Furthermore, there was case of late arrival of INEC officials which led to thuggery, voter suppression and violence which created major impact to low percentage turnout.
3. High rate of vote buying are part of challenges that hitched INEC's conduct of 2019 and 2023 general election: vote buying is not only occurring during elections but also during political primaries; Moreover, vote buying is often perpetrated by politicians who want to win elections at all cost, whereby going too far to spend any amount of money by making sure they induced the electorates with different types of gifts and cash instantly.

Conclusion

This study made the valuable discovery that the cost of the election in Nigeria is expensive and implicative on various fronts, not only in securing party nominations, regulations and spending limits, INEC, but also on the electorates, and governance. With regard to the party nomination, the highest bidders are accorded the tickets at the expense of credible and better candidates just because they are wealthy or have the support of godfathers to sponsor them. The regulations and rules are violated, incurring a high cost to the public treasury due to lavish spending on the campaign in direct violation of the rules. With regard to the INEC, it leads to the cyclical friction of a high expenditure enshrouded in corruption, the inflation of contracts, and possible kickbacks. The electorate in turn suffers as such fraudulent practices leads to mis-governance, corruption, diversion of the public treasury, poverty, and other social vices. This study also established that the Nigerian election is influenced by clientelism as exhibited in the course of party primaries, electoral conduct, and the voting process. The whole process resulted in violence and insecurity affecting the citizens and the country's national security internally. A head of future elections, interpretations of the constitution as they relate to the requirements for a presidential winner to be declared or prospective run-off candidates to be selected should be clarified to reduce the risk of post-election contestation. INEC needs to ensure that the different stakeholders and groups that the commission often draws ad-hoc personnel from, such as the Nigerian Youth Service Corp and Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), have robust training schemes to mirror its efforts as well as adequately paid.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Security Agents must be well fed and need to be given more autonomy to perform their constitutional duties without being induced by candidates, political parties, and government. Security Agents should also be moral in discharging their duties which will enable them to forestall any political violence.
2. Election Commission must play a robust role of conducting and managing free and fair elections efficiently and professionally to help facilitate and empower citizen to vote properly without having a double minded. In addition, it is very important that government should do everything within their power to cultivate a culture that enthuses voters to play their important part in a democracy characterized as government for, by and of the people.
3. Vote buying is an electoral offence, culprits should be brought to book and if convicted, be sentenced to long jail terms. Poverty must be seriously addressed, people turn in their votes for money as a result of the abject poverty with which they are faced. Finally, Government of Nigeria, Civil Society and National Orientation Agency must embark on massive education of the electorates about the dangers and implications of the practice.

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